

	<b>INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES CHILD WELFARE MANUAL</b>	
	<b>Chapter 8:</b> Out-of-Home Services	<b>Effective Date:</b> June 1, 2008
	<b>Section 39:</b> Trial Home Visits	<b>Version:</b> 1

## POLICY

**OLD POLICY: 406.1**

The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) will utilize trial home visits (THV) for a period of three (3) months. It shall then be dismissed but can be extended for an additional three (3) months, when the safety and well-being of the child can reasonably be assured and the following conditions have been met:

1. The child's permanency goal is reunification; and
2. There is documented progress and any safety concerns are identified and addressed and the service level of the case can be decreased at least one level. See separate policy, [4.26 Determining Service Levels](#).

DCS will ensure that a Safety Plan is completed for all children returning to the care of their parent/guardian/custodian on a trial home visit.

The local DCS maintains placement and care responsibilities for the child while on trial home visitation.

**Note:** DCS will remove a child from a trial home visit and return a child to substitute care, if the child's safety and/or well-being are at risk, and the provision of additional family preservation services has not reduced the risk to allow the child to remain in the home safely. DCS will return the child to the same placement whenever possible. See separate policy, [8.37 Holding a Placement during a Temporary Absence](#).

Code References  
[45 CFR 1356.21 \(e\)](#)

## PROCEDURE

Prior to the trial home visit, the Family Case Manager (FCM) will:

1. Offer to convene a Child and Family Team meeting to review case progress and determine if a trial home visit is appropriate. See separate policy, 5.7 Family Team Meetings.
2. Complete a new Strengths and Needs Assessment and a new Risk Assessment. See separate policies, [4.24 Strengths and Needs Assessment](#) and [4.23 Risk Assessment](#).
3. Re-determine the service level. See separate policy, [4.26 Determining Service Levels](#).
4. Complete a Safety Plan.
5. Obtain supervisory approval to recommend the trial home visit to the court.
6. Work with the local DCS office attorney to make a recommendation to the court and seek court approval for the trial home visit, if it is determined that a trial home visit is appropriate.
7. Obtain a court order prior to the start of the trial home visit.

If the trial home visit is approved by the court, the FCM will:

1. Continue to provide the family with services during the home visit period.
2. Update the Case Plan and have the plan signed by the child's parent/guardian/custodian.
3. Provide the parent/guardian/custodian with a copy of the trial home visit plan and place the original, signed copy in the child's file.
4. Assure that the parent/guardian/custodian understands that the child is still under the care and custody of DCS during the trial home visit.
5. Assure contact with the family is maintained in accordance with separate policy [8.10 Minimum Contact](#).
6. Assure that the family has access to appropriate family preservation, family support and rehabilitative services.
7. Continue to monitor the family's progress. See separate policy, [8.10 Minimum Contact](#).

The supervisor will:

1. Review the assessments, service level and input from the family team meetings.
2. Approve or deny the recommendation for the trial home visit.

#### **PRACTICE GUIDANCE**

N/A

#### **FORMS AND TOOLS**

1. Indiana Family Assessment of Strengths and Needs – (Available in ICWIS)
2. Family Risk Assessment – (Available in ICWIS)

#### **RELATED INFORMATION**

##### **Preparing the Child for a Trial Home Visit**

The amount and kind of preparation necessary will vary for each child. Some factors that will impact the need for preparation include the child's age, the length of time in out-of-home care and the quality of the child's relationships with his/her parent/guardian/custodian and resource parent. The child's feelings will also play a major role in his/her adjustment to returning home. Many children worry that they will again be subject to abuse and/or neglect. Some children may experience feelings of disloyalty to their resource family for wanting to return home; some may feel disloyal to their parents for missing the resource family. Regardless of how the child feels, it is very important that the FCM, child's parent and resource parent or another trusted adult from the family team acknowledge the child's feelings and address any fears expressed by the child. Additionally, the FCM and the family team should discuss with the child the expectations, responsibilities and safeguards that will be in place to protect the child.

##### **Preparing the Parent/Guardian/Custodian**

The parent/guardian/custodian may feel uncertain about his/her ability to adequately meet the child's needs. The FCM and parent should discuss anticipated issues and develop plans for

coping with those issues. In addition, they should address the positive changes that have occurred and the strengths of the family.

### **Preparing the Resource Parent**

The bonds that develop between some resource parents and children are so significant that both the child and the adult may grieve the loss. Additionally, the attitude of the resource parent will influence the child's view of return. For this reason, it is important that the resource parent be involved in, and aware of, the plans to reunify the family from the beginning. The goal of reunification should never come as a surprise to the resource parent.

### **Trial Home Visit Situations**

1. Child returns to foster care anytime during the first three months of a THV, no new findings of Placement and Care, Best Interest and Reasonable Efforts are required if the judge had not dismissed the case previously;
2. Child returns to foster care in month four or later and no court order is obtained to extend the visit, new findings of Best Interest, Reasonable Efforts and Placement and Care must be made; and
3. THV is extended by the court beyond the first three months, not to exceed a total of six months, and the child returns to foster care anytime prior to the end of the court ordered extension, no new findings of Best Interest, Reasonable Efforts and Placement and Care are required.

### **Trial Home Visit and Permanency Requirements**

Time the child spends at home on trial home visit **does not count** towards the child's 15 months (of the previous 22 months) in substitute care, at which time the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) rules require DCS to file (or join in) a petition to terminate parental rights (TPR). For more information on TPR, see separate policy, [6.11 Involuntary Termination of Parental Rights](#).

### **The Safety Plan for Reunification**

The Safety Plan should include, but not be limited to the following:

1. Referrals that have been made;
2. Services recommended to continue preventive measures;
3. Actions that the family intends to take, i.e. continue family counseling;
4. Community resources, i.e. support groups, child care referral services; and
5. Established family support systems.